

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES:  
THE EFFECTS OF AGE AND IDEOLOGY  
ON BLACK WOMEN'S VOTING PREFERENCES

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SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES:  
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ON BLACK WOMEN'S VOTING PREFERENCES

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Abstract: This research looks at Black female voters and evaluating if as age increases, left-leaning preferences decrease. Using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) I perform an ordered logit analysis using Age as the dependent variable and ideology and party identification as the independent variables. I find that older Black female voters' left leaning preferences are higher than their younger counterparts.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The United states currently has two main political parties: Democrats and Republicans. While these have been the two main parties in the United States for , the constituents of each party looked vastly different decades ago. These changing political outlooks and voter base stem from Blacks switching from the Republican Party to the Democrat Party circa 1943, as well as Southern white Democrats switching to the Republican Party (Petrocik 1987, Sitkoff 2008). These major political shifts have subsequently sparked a curiosity in political scientists on what determines vote preferences and choosing one political party over the other as well as the ideology underlying them. Political Scientists have long been interested in differences in voting preferences between men and women, between minorities and majorities to the effects age has on vote preferences and almost every variation of these factors in between (Wolfinger 1980).

All these facets of research have been studied at length, but they have not always been studied in conjunction. One such factor that will be discussed at length is age and how it intersects with women's voting preferences. One of the aspects of preference that is of most interest to this specific study concerns the research detailing women's voting preferences and different factors that influence and affect it.

Research has shown that women are more likely to vote liberally, or for a democratic candidate, than men are (Inglehart and Norris 2000). The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation's program: Black Women's Roundtable found that black women tend to vote in a similar manner as each other, with black women leaning more to the left end of the spectrum (Black Women's Roundtable 2017). This program has conducted a study to further understand the political attitudes of Black women as well as any potential changes in those outlooks.

But beginning around the time of the 2008 election and continuing, as well as burgeoning, in the 2012 and 2016 electoral cycles, the left end of the political spectrum has become more varied than it has been for quite some time. Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) found that there has been a dramatic increase party and ideological identification, and that along with this increase came a substantial increase in party and ideological polarization. In the same vein, Layman, et al. (2006) found that party polarization was not only becoming more intense, it was also extending itself on both ends of the spectrum, and instead of displacing current issues, it instead simply was another issue that added to it. This widened polarization had left open the gates for wider inclusiveness for both parties, and for the focus of this study specifically, the left party. With this expanded range of the political spectrum, it is imperative to see how different sub-groups that were once clustered at one end spread out among it. One of the largest blocs that fit this definition are black women.

Research has shown that black women tend to vote left leaning (Black Women's Roundtable 2017, Simien 2005), but now that that there is more than one variant of left—meaning more diversity among the American left—what kind of splits, if any, are visible

among the liberal leaning set of black female voters. Overall findings suggest either that there is or there is an expectation that age has an impact on voting preferences.

Abramowitz and Saunders (2008), as well as Mason (2014), asserts that one of the results of party polarization is the broadening of the ideological spectrum. This extension of the ends of the spectrum has led, or is expected to lead, to different voting preferences than have traditionally been the case, especially among distinct voting blocs such as younger voters and women.

These findings, or expected findings, bring up more questions about voting preferences and how well voters are currently adhering to other previously established preferences. Integral to this study is how the growth of America's political left end of the spectrum might alter black women's voting preferences. Extensive evidence indicates that a combination of linked fate and liberal attitudes lead black women to vote more Democratic (Sitkoff 2008). The black female voting monolith that resulted has been shown to overtake any cross-cutting effects. However, taking into account the previously mentioned modern age effects, there is a possibility that newer political shifts could stratify the monolithic black female voting bloc. If black women follow the anticipated pattern, older black women would identify ideologically as more traditional Democrats, whereas younger black women would be less likely to identify as such, maintaining a Democratic ideology, but at a position further left than their older counterparts. Are older black women more conventional Democrats while younger black women classify themselves as closer to the far-left end of the political spectrum? Another way to phrase it is: are older black women more likely to be Clinton voters while younger women are more likely to lean to the Sanders and Warren end of the spectrum?

Historically age has not mattered in relation to black women's voting preferences. But an expanded left side of the spectrum begs the question of whether it could. *Is there any evidence of a life cycle effect on the ideology that informs black women's voting preferences?* Life cycle effects are a byproduct of age. Specifically, when looking at established democracies, age and life cycle effects equate to longer experience with how political systems and parties operate, which in turn allow more time to formulate ideologies and preferences (Anderson and Just 2012). I hypothesize that, due to the life cycle theory, age influences black women's voting preferences in such a manner that, as age increases, left-leaning preferences will decrease.

To test my hypothesis, I will be using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). I chose this data set over other available options because, (while also having an oversample of black women) it had survey questions and data that directly correlated with the present study. I will be performing a logit analysis on this data because my dependent variables are a 5-point ideology scale that ranges from very liberal to very conservative and a 7-point party identification scale that ranges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

After running the logit analysis, I found that as black women age, they become more liberal in their vote choice. This relationship is contradictory to the hypothesis that I developed.

This research will contribute to the larger body of literature on how gender and race correlate with age and affect voting. This is particularly salient for literature on black voters because much of that literature asserts that blacks vote as a uniform block but does not address how age might influence that uniformity.

The remainder of this research study will be as follows: the next section is the literature review, which will discuss both the current literature and the creation of a new relationship in research. The third section is the theory section, in which I endeavor to construct a theory based on frameworks discussed in the literature review. The fourth section will be comprised of the data and methodology. The fifth section will be the results, and the final section will conclude.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Delving into the issue of vote choice and the different factors that influence it, as well as how Black women vote specifically, requires looking at what the general influences are on voting.

The main theory that has been used to explain the way blacks vote is the Group Identification theory. This theory posits that a person will look to the groups they belong to (political, social, economic, cultural) and from these groups they will derive the sense of who they are (Philpot, et al. 2007). This theory undergirds political scientists' view that Blacks are a monolith of Democrat voters, because as a group they have looked to Democrats to substantively represent them, even if they are not able to get the descriptive representation. This reliance on substantive representation from Democrats began during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, as a result of the New Deal policies that he created that also benefited Blacks as well as the combination of Eleanor Roosevelt's public anti-discrimination stance and the fact that the Republican party took Black's votes for granted (Sitkoff 2008).

A competing theory, which has been used to group people and their voting preferences in a different way is the Life Cycle theory. This theory posits that “older individuals have been around for a longer period of time than younger citizens” (Anderson and Just 2012) and as such have differing views that have been shaped through the time that they have been alive. This theory suggests that younger citizens are more likely to vote more liberally than older citizens, and that as they age they become more conservative (Fisher 2008, Grasso 2014). This is exacerbated and mitigated by many different factors. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between age and voter turnout, but that it is more of a bell curve. Younger people are less likely to participate in elections, but this is partly influenced by the fact that the only sources of political knowledge that they possess come from “family, peer group(s) and the school” (Strate, et al. 1989). However, as young people grow, and as some attend college, their sources of political knowledge changes and grows, and at the height of the political knowledge and age—middle aged for the study by Strate et al (1989)—people are the most likely to vote. This positive correlation declines and begins to have negative relationship with vote choice once people reach a certain age (old age), and begin to be plagued by diseases, health issues, and other problems that may make voter turnout and participation less feasible. While these effects are significant, when this theory is pitted against Group Identification theory, especially as it relates to the voting bloc of Black women, Group Identification wins out and is more influential than the Life Cycle theory in influencing how this group votes (Gay and Tate 1998).

Relating these two theories to the current political parties, studies on linked fate—which is the “recognition that individual life choices are inextricably tied to the race as a

whole” (Simien 2005)—have shown that Blacks are more likely to vote left even with other typical influences, such as gender, age and income, that might have affected vote choice (Simien 2005). Regarding how far left, we do know that women in general, including and focusing on black female voters, vote more liberally than men (Inglehart and Norris 2000). Another group that tends to vote left is young people (Grasso 2014). As political polarization has increased, these groups that make up the left have become more varied, this is in part because the issues that have come up in more contemporary times have not displaced older politically polarizing issues, they have simply extended the polarization to include these issues (Layman, et al. 2006).

This variation has also been attributed to what many have labeled ‘Post-Racial America.’ This period in the United States has been labeled as such because America has had a Black president and this in turn, for some, was a signal that race was no longer as prominent an issue as in previous years (Lum 2009, Metzler 2009). However, while this seemed to be the view of many American citizens, there are equally as many political scientists who disagree and instead assert that this has only further delineated America as a race-conscious society (Bonilla-Silva 2015). These conflicting beliefs have further widened the left spectrum.

What exactly does a widened political spectrum mean? This means that the Democratic Party’s ideological center has shifted and the same can be said of the Republican Party. These shifts allow the political left and right to encompass more varying ideologies as well as bring them more into the mainstream view of the party than they previously were. As was mentioned earlier in this review, while it has been established that Black women tend to vote on the left (or more liberal) side of the



political spectrum, there has been little to no research done on *how far left* black women will vote. It is in this area that a factor that has not been considered significant in relation to Black women and how they vote may have an impact. Can age splinter the monolithic bloc that is Black female voters?

The new space in the literature that this paper will be addressing is what this means for the voting habits of black women when age is a determining factor. This study hopes to flesh out any potential causal relationships that may become apparent due to this new association that is forming. More specifically, this research will test whether Black women always vote the same throughout the entirety of their lives, or if vote choice changes with age.

## CHAPTER III

### ARGUMENT AND HYPOTHESIS

When it comes to voting, much literature has covered the effect that race and gender have on the way people vote. The previous literature has discussed these effects by themselves, as well as how they operate in tandem to assist a voter in formulating their party identification and vote choice. Relating this literature to the present study, there is plethora of literature on black female voters and how they decide to vote. While that literature is vast, there is significantly less literature on the intersecting effects that age have on how black women vote.

This matters because while age has been found as a very conservatizing factor for many years, if there are some groups that age does not affect in that way, it will further assist in how we look at voting preferences and the demographics of those we are studying.

The causal relationships that this research study highlights are the fact that as people age, they go through life-cycle effects. These effects can cause a change in vote choice as well as some stances on policies (Wagner and Kritzinger 2012, Grasso 2014).

### *Theories and Framework*

It has already been established through previous literature that there is a viable framework through which to ascertain more information about voters. One of the foremost theories is the Group Identification theory, which was discussed at length in the literature review. As a reminder, *Group Identification* theory posits that a person will look to the groups they belong to and from these groups they will derive the sense of who they are (Philpot, et al. 2007).

The second previously mentioned theory I draw upon to craft my hypothesis will address the age differences in this study. This *Life Cycle* theory posits that “older individuals have been around for a longer period of time than younger citizens” (Anderson and Just 2012 pg. 308). This means that the older generation has had longer to formulate their views, based on experience as well as expressed preference solidification (cementing how they feel about certain political issues). Using these theories as justification, I intend to look at age as an intervening variable on black female voters and where they land on the spectrum.

These two theories on their own lead to distinct expectations. Group Identification theory states that black women will vote for candidates within the party they believe represent their best interests (Democrats) regardless of whether or not the candidate descriptively represents them. On the other hand, Life Cycle theory asserts that Black women should conservatize as they age. When these two theories are studied together, it will be interesting to see if Black women’s shared identification either suppresses or supports their natural life cycle effects and how that has shaped their preferences. I argue that the Life Cycle theory will be an explanatory factor in whether or not women who

grew up during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights era have a different voting preference and pattern than the generation of women who grew up in ‘post-racial America.’

### *Hypothesis*

Drawing on these existing theories, my hypothesis is (fig. 1):

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *As Age increases, Black female voters will shift to the right of the center-left scale.*

Fig. 1



Now that the theory, framework and hypotheses have been established, the following section will cover the datasets I am using as well as the methodology that will be employed to test the presently constructed hypotheses.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA AND METHODS

This portion covers the data and methods section of the present research study. It will first cover the data sets and sources utilized as well as their origins. Next it will cover the dependent and control variables used for the data analysis. The following section will look at my unit of analysis, and the subsequent section will cover the methodological approach I will be implementing. The final section will conclude.

The datasets that I will be utilizing come from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2016) and encompass 2008, 2012, and 2016. While this dataset does not cater specifically to African Americans women, the population sample that was polled had a substantial and adequate oversampling of African American women—after narrowing the scope of the data solely to the issues I was examining, it gave me a population of about 50,000 women per year to observe. The data that I am using was utilized to ask the respondents about demographic and political information, as well as vote choice. The data from this survey looked at all the questions regarding political attitudes—including questions concerning ideology and party identification—to ascertain how the respondents made their vote choice.

### *Dependent Variable*

The research question that I am interested in is whether there is any evidence of a life cycle effect on Black women's voting preferences. As covered in previous sections of this study, there has been a correlation between Age and vote choice. To test the applicability of Age in Black female vote choice, I will be focusing on the preferences that the individual respondents have in regards to vote choice. However, since it is not possible currently to know respondents' preferences automatically, I will be using the preferences that the respondents articulated through their survey responses. For this study, I will call these responses "expressed preferences". I am defining this term as the respondent's conscious choosing of one option over another.

In order to operationalize these expressed preferences I will be using CCES data. Utilizing this data, I have two separate dependent variables that I will be studying in this investigation: the 5-point scale of ideology and the 7-point party identification scale. The 5-point ideology scale's question that was employed by the CCES was: "In general, how would you describe your own political view? (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2016)." The scale answer choices ranged from very liberal at one end to very conservative at the other. Table 1.1 with the visual for this question has been included.

Table 1

In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?

1	Very Liberal
2	Liberal
3	Moderate
4	Conservative
5	Very Conservative

The second dependent variable that I utilized in this study was the 7-point party identification scale. This question was a self-identifying scale with which respondents could choose an option that ranges from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican. Using this scale as an additional variable will add another dimension with which to gauge whether left leaning black female voters become more conservative as time wears on. This will also cover differences that may not be exhibited in the ideological preferences of the registered voters but may be present in the way in which they identify themselves politically. A table of this question has also been included below.

Table 2

In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?	
1	Strong Democrat
2	Not very strong Democrat
3	Lean Democrat
4	Independent
5	Lean Republican
6	Not very strong Republican
7	Strong Republican

While I will be running two separate tests on these variables, combined they will constitute what I have defined as the Expressed Preferences of the individual black female voter.

#### *Independent Variable*

For this study, since I am looking at whether older Black women have a different voting preference than younger Black women, I will use Age as my independent variable. The dataset that I am using does not have a variable for age, so I have created the variable by taking the birth year that is given on the questionnaire and subtracting it from the end date that was provided in each questionnaire. To further underscore the importance behind using age as my independent variable, I refer to wider variation that has been found on the left end of the spectrum. Because this spectrum has become so wide, it is possible that groups that have been viewed as clustered may have spread further out along the spectrum, and I believe that age may be a useful identifier. To test my



hypothesis, I use age as a continuous variable with defined ends of the spectrum. Since the data is not re-interviewing the respondents as they age, what this means is that I am looking at the preferences of black women as age increases. For reference, I define “younger” by roughly taking the bottom 25% of respondent’s age. I define older as the top 25% of respondent’s age. This translated to younger being 40 and below, and older being 70 and above for all three years of data. While I have these two ends of the spectrum, I am not solely interested in looking at those two. I am interested in looking at the differences of voting preferences *as age increases*, so it is necessary to have the two opposing ends of the spectrum defined.

### *Control Variables*

While the literature that I have discussed so far has been focused on the main variables that I am interested in for this research, there are many other factors known to influence vote choice that must be controlled for. These factors fall into two categories, and those are systemic and socioeconomic factors. I will briefly discuss them here.

### *Systemic Factors*

The overarching category of systemic factors that have been identified as having bearing on vote choice can be further broken down into sub-categories of both short-term and long-term institutional factors. Short-term factors are those that are unique to a specific election and how it affects that election’s turnout. These types of factors are the closeness of the election, who is running for election, as well as what issues are present and pressing at that time. On the other hand, long-term factors on the other hand are those that encompass registration laws, state institutional strength and state socioeconomic standing (Leighley and Nagler 1992). These factors are also known as contextual variables

because they “measure the socioeconomic status of the context in which the individual lives” (Leighley and Nagler 1992).

### *Socioeconomic Factors*

While many of the previous studies have found that systemic factors play a part in how people vote and the way they vote, more research has demonstrated that socioeconomic factors have more of an integral role in who votes. Previous research has found that when looking at both systemic factors like socioeconomic status and state institutional strength, as well as individual/demographic factors such as race and gender, that the demographic and individual factors were more significant and had more of a relationship with voters (Leighley and Nagler 1992).

The main purpose of including these factors is to further define the population that I will be researching. These factors will work in conjunction with the additional control variables I will be applying in the present study.

### *Education*

A rise in education is an established control variable with a positive correlation on vote choice. Studies have found that people with a college education are more likely to vote. This can be explained as, “a college education encourages greater vigilance in monitoring, and thinking about, politics” (Strate, et al. 1989). The PEW Research Center (2015) found that postgraduate education was positively correlated with liberal ideology. However, another study by Citrin, et al. (2003) found conflicting evidence on which direction education results in. Their study however, found that one of the databases that they utilized, CPS, had conflicting directions, with some of the education results leaning

towards more Democrat and others leaning towards more Republican, was subject to over reporting and thus is not as statistically relevant as other data.

#### *Family Income*

Family income will be a control variable in this study because it has been found that as income increases, voters tend to become more conservative in their vote choice (Leighley and Nagler 1992).

#### *Religion and Religiosity*

Church attendance and religion have been closely interrelated with vote choice. While there have not been very many studies on specific religions and the differential effects they have on vote choice, the studies that have been conducted have found that mainline Protestants lean towards conservative political views, while Jews and evangelical Protestants lean towards more liberal political views (Layman 1997). but overall regular church attendance has been found to be positively correlated to vote choice.

#### *Employment and Marital Status*

Employment has been seen as a factor that increases political participation. This is because it can increase the opportunities for political discussions, as well as diversify and deepen a person's economic interest (Desposato and Norrander 2008). When looking at it from this angle, employment can influence a voter's voting preferences and thus must be controlled for.

One intervening factor when it comes to employment socialization is marriage. Iversen and Rosenbluth 2010) found that in a marriage, especially one in which the main breadwinner is the man, women become more conservative because most of the policies

that protect the provider are conservative policies. When adults marry and raise families they become socially invested in their communities and foster a sense of attachment and wanting to maintain that community as much as possible (Strate, et al. 1989). The research also shows that married women vote more conservatively.

#### *Unit of Analysis*

The units of analysis will be the individual voter and is formatted in binary form and has been gathered by the CCES.

#### *Methodological Approach*

The methodological approach that will be utilized will be an ordered logit statistical test. I am using this model because it assumes non-negative dependent variables separated into sequential categories and best fits the two dependent variables that I am using that have 5 and 7-point scales.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below are tables 1 and 2 that show the results of the test run on the ideology variable and the party identification variable.

In table 1, the key independent variable was not statistically significant for this analysis. This means that age did not have any statistical effect on the ideology of black women.

Among the control variables for ideology, neither education nor employment had a consistent statistically significant effect on black women. The remaining control variables (save for religion) seemed to be negatively correlated with ideology.

Table 3

Ideology	2008		2012		2016
Education	0.26		2.90**		1.67
Marital Status	-2.16*		-4.40**		-5.25**
Employment	-0.92		-2.01*		-1.66
Religious Importance	-3.85**		-9.80**		-12.61**
Family Income	0.14		3.56**		5.49**
Age	0.46		-0.30		1.28
<i>p</i> : .01**, .05*					

In table 2, our independent variable was statistically significant for all the years that were studied. Marital status, importance of religion, and religious identity were all found to be statistically significant.

Table 4

Party ID	2008		2012		2016
Education	-0.31		-3.79**		-0.65
Marital Status	-0.53		-1.63		-2.06**
Employment	-0.18		-0.51		0.73
Religious Importance	2.56**		5.17**		5.93**
Family Income	-2.72**		-2.09*		0.11
Age	3.51**		11.84**		13.48**
<i>p</i> : .01**, .05*					

While this study did not sample the same black women over time, this study was able to capture black women at many different ages and thus gives us the ability to extrapolate probabilities of this behavior and how it would translate to a more generalized black female population.

The results for the ideology test that was run on these variables did not yield a statistically significant return for age. This means that ideology, at least for Black Women, does not follow a life cycle effect and change as age increases. The control variables for that test acted in line with what theories have previously asserted for them, except for employment in 2012. This year it showed that employment seemed to have a more conservatizing effect on Black Women. The results for this test were not surprising given the measurement of ideology that was used. It was not nuanced enough for the information that I was trying to glean. In order to better get results for this type of investigation, a future measure of ideology would at least need to be a 7-point scale.

For Party ID, our key independent variable—age—offers support of our hypothesis that, as the ages of the women in this sample were older, they were more likely to become strong democrats. Looking at the control variables for this test, the statistically significant variables again performed as the theories and themes outlined in the literature review posited they would. This result is what we would expect, and the fact that the younger aged women were less liberal was surprising. However, these results should also be taken lightly, because it's a self-reported measure, and one person's definition of a Strong Democrat may not be the same as another person's. The relationship between ideology and party id in this study is an interesting one because, although Ideology did not get stronger with age, Party identification did. Meaning, while

a Black women may classify herself as a lean Democrat in her youth and a strong Democrat in her later years, her ideological stance does not change. At this moment it is up to debate whether or not this difference will burgeon as party polarization increases and become a more significant factor in the distinction between voting patterns of older and younger black women.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This research was motivated by a desire to see whether current political trends affect the strong group identity of Black women. The Black voting monolith has existed for decades and followed the same major theoretical patterns when it came to voting preferences. However, I wanted to see if, when separated, the singular group of black women followed these theories or if they deviated from the expected pattern. This was important to me because if there was an apparent sign of deviation, this could influence future policies and research regarding Black women's voting patterns.

As such, the purpose of this research study was to answer the research question: *Is there any evidence of a life cycle effect on the ideology that formulates black women's voting preferences?* In this way, I was able to address the interaction between black women's voting preferences and their age. The contribution of this study was to have more meaningful and precise information about the voting preferences of a group. Reflecting on the results presented in the earlier section of this paper it is safe to say that, with regards to the data and regression analyses conducted here, the life cycle theory does not seem to motivate older black women to view themselves less liberally.

In fact, the older black women in the study identified themselves as being more liberal. As stated in the literature review, while church attendance and religious importance have been two factors that have been aligned with conservative vote and thought for the American public (Fiorina 1999), these factors made black women more liberal and less conservative when it came to vote choice and preference. This was due to the democratic void that the church had to fill to replace a political system that did not allow them to participate at that time.

However, there are some limitations to the current study. Chief among them is the limited amount of data that was available. The Cooperative Congressional Election Study only had data on the past 3 elections. Other data sets were not as detailed and thus were not a fit for this study. Another limitation was the 5-point scale for ideology. It was not nuanced enough to garner any statistically significant results. A future study would hinge upon the development of a more nuanced scale to ask respondents, with at least 7-points on it. This study would also have to come up with a more objective way to measure party identification, or at least make the manner in which they garner that information more standardized.

Future research would have to get more voter-related data, possibly conducting studies during congressional elections as well to get a better overall scope of voters and their preferences. This research could also do more in depth qualitative research that delved further into the “why” behind the increased age/liberalization shift for black

women as voters, as well as look at some of the factors, in detail, that help them formulate such voting preferences.

One of the most intriguing avenues for future research of this study would be studying why, as age increases for Black women, their political party's identification change (become stronger) but their ideological stance does not.

Overall, this study and any future research that stemmed from it would clarify why certain groups vote the way they do, and it would also help us to create, maintain and solidify the institutions that further cement vote choice for this and other groups of people.

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